

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 13856

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT UR

SUBJ: KOSYGIN ILLNESS AND TIKHONOV APPOINTMENT

REF: A) PRAGUE 2503 (NOTAL) B) MOSCOW 13742 (NOTAL)

1. ENGLISH TASS HAS JUST CARRIED ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE APPOINTMENT OF N.A. TIKHONOV, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN SINCE 1965, AS FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, WHICH WAS CARRIED EARLIER BY RUSSIAN TASS ALONG WITH ITEM THAT TIKHONOV AND MAZUROV (UBUT NOT KOSYGIN) SAW BREZHNEV OFF AT AIRPORT THIS MORNING ON HIS WAY TO ECONOMIC MEETING IN KAZAKHSTAN.

2. WE WOULD NOTE THAT TIKHONOV WAS BORN IN 1905 AND DOES NOT HOLD A SENIOR PARTY POSITION, PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE THAT HE IS NOT A CONTENDER FOR TOP POLITICAL JOBS AND IS NOT REGARDED AS ONE. AND, ALTHOUGH INR'S INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY IS MORE REFINED THAN OURS, WE ALSO NOTE THAT MULTIPLE FIRST DEPUTIES WERE COMMON FEATURE
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OF POST-STALIN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IN 1950'S SO THAT

TEAMING TIKHONOV WITH MAZUROV IS NOT WITHOUT INSTITUTIONAL PRECEDENT.

3. THUS, ONE POSSIBLE IMPLICATION OF APPOINTMENT OF TIKHONOV, AN EXPERIENCED METALLURGIST WITH LONG GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE, IS THAT KOSYGIN IS INDEED AILING AND REQUIRES ADDED SUPPORT AS PREMIER. THEORETICALLY, APPOINTMENT COULD IMPLY THAT MAZUROV IS EITHER ON HIS WAY UP OR ON HIS WAY OUT, BUT HIS APPEARANCE WITH TIKHONOV AT BREZHNEV AIRPORT DEPARTURE SUGGESTS THAT HE IS AT LEAST NOT ON HIS WAY OUT.

4. IN ADDITION TO AMBASSADOR MATSKEVICH (REF A) OTHER SOVIET SOURCES HAVE ALSO CONFIRMED FACT OF KOSYGIN'S ILLNESS, THOUGH DETAILS VARY. ITALIAN REP REPORTED AT INTERNALISTS' MEETING SEPT 2 THAT ITALIAN MINISTER CASTALDO HAD BEEN TOLD BY SOVIET THAT KOSYGIN IS ILL, AND UPI CORRESPONDENT HAL TYNER WAS TOLD SEPT 1 THAT KOSYGIN SUFFERS FROM INCAPACITATING KIDNEY DISEASE; THAT WHILE ON VACATION HE HAD AN ATTACK STRONG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO FALL INTO THE WATER, OF WHICH HE SWALLOWED SO MUCH THAT HIS TWO BODYGUARDS, PLAYING CHESS NEARBY, WERE OBLIGED TO ADMINISTER MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION; AND THAT HE IS COMPLETELY RECOVERED. TYNER'S REPORT DIVERGES FROM MATSKEVICH'S ON NATURE OF THE ATTACK--HEART VS KIDNEYS-- AND THE EXTENT OF THE RECOVERY-- COMPLETE OR STILL RESTING. TIKHONOV APPOINTMENT MAY BE SIGN THAT RECOVERY IS NOT COMPLETE.

5. FINALLY, UK REP REPORTED AT INTERNALISTS' MEETING THAT STORY ON KOSYGIN HEART ATTACK HAD APPEARED IN LONDON EVENING NEWS WITHOUT VICTOR LOUIS BYLINE, AND THEN BEEN REPLACED IN NEXT EDITION BY TONED-DOWN VERSION UNDER HIS NAME. BYPLAY ON WAY KOSYGIN'S ILLNESS WAS ANNOUNCED BY SOVIETS REMAINS MYSTERIOUS, THEREFORE, THE WAY THE SOVIETS CHOOSE TO HANDLE FACT THAT HE IS ACTUALLY ILL SHOULD BE EVEN MORE INTERESTING.
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